

Michigan House of Representatives
Health Policy Committee

Re: House Bills 4476 and 4183, Mandated Autism Treatment
Date: June 9, 2009

Dear Health Policy Committee Members,

I have just learned you are considering legislation to have autism covered (like all "physical" illnesses) by health insurance companies.

I hope you will re-consider because I don't understand why you would single out one specific brain disorder and not consider those suffering with other diagnosis.

Let me tell you a little about my nephew who is now a teenager. He has suffered since he was a toddler; and his family has gone through hell with him. I could fill pages of their experiences, and their inability to get a proper diagnosis and treatment, but I'm just going to tell you about their last such experience.

When he began puberty his symptoms were out-of-control; he was miserably unhappy; he was an outcast at school and he wanted to die. His parents had spent years trying to find help for him and nothing really worked. When he stood on the 2nd story garage and threatened to jump he was taken to a hospital in Oakland County where he was so drugged he might have just as well died.

At this point his parents called me. They were sobbing and desperate and without anywhere to turn. Their loving instincts told them to get him out of there before he was completely lost to them. Their insurance company would not help them; the school could not help him; the hospital apparently could not.

Through me they got to a Wayne County psychiatrist who is an expert in treating childhood brain disorders. He spent time with them as a favor but their insurance would not pay for treatment because there were "appropriate" psychiatrists within their own county. Trying to help I finally found an acquaintance who knew someone at their insurance company. With her help we were able to get him the right diagnosis and care; finally!

He finally had a diagnosis; he has bipolar disorder and he is much better today. This is a brain disorder that is NOT AUTISM. There are many such children and families going through their own kind of hell. The insurance companies treat them like it's their fault; or no big deal. Their insurance company will pay for anything "physical" but, for brain disorders, their coverage goes through some managed care company, which decides the best treatment and is 50% co-pay.

I would urge that you not single out one disorder and ignore the rest. That is simply unfair and doesn't make sense. It also makes no sense that in this day and age, insurance companies are allowed to discriminate against people with brain disorders or other mental illnesses.

Thank you for your consideration.

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